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Bureau of Education

PARENT-TEACHER ASSOCIATIONS.

The Parent-Teacher Association movement has grown steadily during the past year. Recognizing their own need, parents have made united and earnest efforts in various parts of the country to better their conditions by coming together to talk over their problems. They have joined with the teacher in discussing their problems. Every State has joined the nation-wide movement in the interest of the home and the school to a greater or less extent. Thirty-four State conferences of parents and teachers on home education and child welfare were held during the past year.

Three national conferences on home education were held during the year—one at the meeting of the Department of Superintendence of the meeting of the National Education Association in New York, and one in Nashville, Tenn. Thousands of district and local conferences were held throughout the country. The welfare of the child and home education were the chief topics of discussion at these meetings. At the New York meeting the cooperation of mothers and kindergartners was under discussion.

Miss Elizabeth Harrison, of Chicago, in her address on "Mothers without kindergartens," said:

There are many thousands of young mothers in our land who long to give the advantages of the kindergarten training to their children, but who are powerless to accomplish this because of the apathy, the ignorance, or the poverty of the community in which they live.

But the children of these many earnest mothers need not be entirely without the development of mind and body which the kindergarten brings. There is much which such mothers, alone and unaided, may do along kindergarten lines if they will give as much time and effort to this important thought of awakening and nourishing aright the best instincts of their children as they are now given to less vitally important subjects.

The thoughtful young mother realizes that there is a vast difference between a strong, well "young animal" and her child's possession of a well-controlled, serviceable body which obeys the slightest command of the spirit within.

The kindergartner understands this, and gives to her children experiences in the coordination of their muscles by letting them walk on a raised board or a chalk line on the floor, by encouraging their running or skipping or hopping in time to loud or soft music, sometimes fast and sometimes slow. The isolated mother may not be a musician or she may not have time to play on the piano for her children's lively dancing, but she can sing as she works and they can run or skip or dance in time to her song. I once heard Miss Frances Willard state that she learned to dance by keeping time to a hymn which her mother would sing, over and over again, for her and her little sister to dance by. Learning to go up and down stairs alone, to climb fences, to swing on branches of trees are all helpful means of giving the child confidence in the use of his body.

Again the kindergartner knows how much added zest the imagination gives to all such exercise and the breadth of sympathy it adds throughout all

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life, so she soon leads her children to dramatize the world about them. They learn to play that they are flying birds, or fluttering butterflies, or running brooks, or growing trees, or the rushing and whirling wind, as well as to play that they are mammas and papas, grocerymen and messenger boys, or other human agencies. For she, the kindergartner, has learned that the child's simple re-enacting of the activities which surround him is helpful to him not only in exercising his body more vigorously but also in awakening his interest in nature and in the right kind of human activities. May not a mother in the midst of her many cares still find time while she performs her necessary work to play thus with her child? A few words on her part will start the little one along a whole line of dramatic representation, which will be as good for the soul as it is for the body.

Again, the kindergartner knows the influence of stories upon the life of the child—how they help to lift him out of his own narrow little world into an almost limitless world of ideals and possibilities. Surely the young mother who cares enough for her child to desire to awaken right ideas in his mind can soon train herself into a story-teller. It will give to her an added charm in the eyes of her children which will last far into their growing boyhood and girlhood. Wisely selected stories, well told, bring an impetus as can no other means toward the real culture which comes from a love of literature and of history.

The kindergartner encourages the child to express his ideas by using chalk, crayon, pencil, or, when skilled enough, with water-color paints. The mother need not be an artist to start these lines of interest in her child. His own eager little self will gladly seize the opportunity for self-expression through these easy means of representations. Again and again I have known mothers to be astonished at the unsuspected ability of their children to express themselves in this way when given the free use of a small blackboard and chalk.

Last, but not least, the kindergartner realizes the social value of the child's commingling with other children near his own stage of growth or development and consequently divides her children into groups of helpers and helped, thus teaching them to bear and forbear, to respect the rights of others, and to enrich their own small lives with the ideas and experiences of other small lives that lie nearer their comprehension than do the ideas and expressions of grown-up people. The only way in which the isolated mother can compensate for the lack of this great influence in her child's life is by becoming as a little child herself and striving to understand the child's point of view. If she does this her reward will be rich and wonderful, for it will bring to her a glimpse of her child's inner world of which without this comradeship she will know nothing.

Miss Lucy Wheelock, of the Kindergarten Training School, Boston, Mass. spoke on the "Need of Preparedness for Service." She referred particularly to preparedness for the girls. She said:

Every woman, be she mother, sister, or aunt, needs to know how to "live with children" in the spirit of Froebel's motto. Hence she should have a liberal course in child study, including child hygiene, child psychology, child literature, games and plays, and occupations. The laws of life and growth should be unfolded to her through a study of biology, and the storybook of nature. "the dear old nurse," becomes her daily text. "The person with a story" is the best friend of children, and no teacher or mother should be without a story. To give the story means knowledge of literature—an acquaintance with the myth, the legend, the folk lore and fairy tale. A song and a lullaby take equal rank with a story as part of a woman's life equipment. Asylum

children and tenement-house children miss many of the goods of fortune. Their greatest lack is the "mothering" which finds expression in the cradle song, in the songs without words, which the mother heart devises for the awakening of the child's soul.

In *Daddy-Long-Legs* and in *The Dear Enemy*, Jean Webster has pictured the difference between *The Home* and a home.

The story, song, and play are necessary to the atmosphere of a home. No one study of any college curriculum or of any finishing school can be compared to the intimate study of child life as suggested by Froebel's "Mother-Play" with its accompanying store of songs and plays.

Instinct is usually wise and leads to a desirable goal. In motherhood of human beings it must be supplemented by insight and training.

Play is instinctive, and children with half a chance will get the benefit of nature's tuition. But with the artificial and crowded conditions of city life, play can not be free and natural. Play spaces are lacking and incentives as well.

Organization and guidance are needed for the play instinct, as for any other, that it may reach its full fruition.

To be a friend of children is to be a playmate. For this reason our girls should know how to play. They should have a repertoire of plays and games—and best of all, the spirit of play. It is the spirit of play which keeps the zest and freshness of life. It is the root of art and the sweetener of tasks.

And, finally, every woman needs to know her neighbors and her relations to them. We may call this study of the neighborhood, sociology or social welfare, or any other name. The main thing is to secure the feeling of responsibility which makes each human being his brother's keeper, or her sister's keeper. The American home training is charged with a serious lack—a lack of the sense of responsibility for the rights and welfare of others. No lack could be more deplorable. The family tie, which binds together parents and children, brothers and sisters, is the first to strengthen. Next the bond which holds together communities with common interests and common claims for weal or woe.

Beyond the community is the State with its call for loyal service, and last that "great society" of world citizenship. Loyalty to the family, to the State, to the great human family wherever gathered—this the aim of our course in social service.

Mothers, you are the home makers! You are the true "keepers of the city"! Your daughters, too, are to be home makers. Give them the training that they may live better the lives you meant to live.

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